

**PROJETO YABAS: REFLECTIONS ON HIP HOP AND BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-MAKING
IN RECIFE, BRAZIL**

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In this article, we present and reflect upon Projeto Yabas, a collaborative community-based project that, through hip hop, seeks to facilitate young women's conceptualization of themselves as Black women and to recognize and combat racial and sexual domestic violence in Recife, Brazil. We explore how Black feminist theory can be used by Black women activists in the hip hop movement in Recife to engage in empowering forms of self-making that are crucial for their development as active political subjects. Reflecting on the experiences of Projeto Yabas highlights the need to critically examine certain aspects of the hip hop movement's political activism and organization, namely, the participation of women within the movement and the possibilities of Black feminist thought.

Hip hop in Recife, Brazil is understood by its protagonists as a social movement. Much more than a cultural manifestation, hip hop provides a praxis for marginalized Black youth to recover their voices, present themselves artistically, organize politically against racial violence, and take part in the dialectic exercise of guaranteeing and amplifying their rights. In 2011, we coordinated and worked with Projeto Yabas, a collaborative community-based project that, through hip hop, seeks to facilitate young women's conceptualization of themselves as Black women and to recognize and combat racial, sexual, and domestic violence. In what follows, we reflect on the experiences of this project focusing our attention on Black women's practices of self-making and resistance.

We begin by providing an introduction to the hip hop scene in Recife, followed by a discussion of the development and reformulation of Projeto Yabas. We detail this process to illustrate some of the difficulties faced by hip hop activists in securing funding, planning, and implementing community projects. These difficulties are significant because they challenge us to analyze the limits and possibilities of government-sponsored cultural citizenship initiatives in Brazil. Discussion is then shifted toward a focus on processes of Black women's self-making in Projeto Yabas so as to explore how Black feminist theory can be used by Black women activists in the hip hop movement in Recife to engage in empowering forms of self-making that are crucial for their development as active political subjects. Such processes inform not only how Black women react to and cope with racism and sexual violence in their daily lives, but also the ways in which Black women negotiate with the Brazilian state to claim citizenship rights. We conclude by suggesting that the experiences of Projeto Yabas highlight the need to critically examine certain aspects of the hip hop movement's political activism and organization, namely, the participation of women within the movement and the possibilities of Black feminist thought.

We draw on Black feminist scholarship from both the United States and Brazil. Kia Lilly Caldwell reminds us that "U.S. feminists of color have long argued that feminism's exclusive focus on gender as the source of women's oppression ... negates and erases other aspects of women's identities and experiences, including race, sexuality, and class" (*Ethnographies* 23). Afro-Brazilian feminist scholars similarly have illustrated how "the failure to address the relationship between racial and gender domination has obscured white women's complicity in maintaining white privilege and reinforced the subaltern status of black women" (*Ethnographies* 28-29). However, as Caldwell points out, women's studies and feminist scholarship in Brazil has largely ignored Black Brazilian feminists such as Sueli Carneiro and Lélia Gonzalez (*Ethnographies* 26-29). Caldwell thus argues that, alongside Black Brazilian feminist scholarship, "the work of British, U.S., and Canadian feminists is useful in analyzing the ways in which differences among [Brazilian] women are tied to larger structures of inequality, particularly those resulting from practices of racial domination" (*Ethnographies* 31-32).

Additionally, the Black feminist theory presented in this project emerged out of the activism itself, and thus our use of scholarship from both the U.S. and Brazil is closely aligned

with Keisha-Khan Y. Perry's discussion of Black diaspora feminism. Perry argues that Black women's "militancy is a product of both feminist theorizing and social activism throughout the African diaspora" ("The Groundings"). Our notion of the African diaspora, which follows the theory developed by Edmund T. Gordon and others,

focuses on Black agency and the processes of self-making; the Black/African Diaspora as a trans-national cultural, intellectual, and, above all, political project that seeks to name, represent, and participate in Black people's historic efforts to construct our collective identities and constitute them through cultural-political practices dedicated to expressing our full humanity and seeking ... liberation. (94)

Perry develops a notion of diaspora feminism, explaining that "Diaspora identifications as black women ... illustrate parallel constructions across multiple racial and gender communities. The feminist politics of scholars and activists permit a broad analysis of black women's subjectivities in Brazil within the broader international structures of racial and gender subordination" ("The Groundings"). Like Caldwell, Perry calls for a "cross-cultural articulation of feminist thought ... concerned with issues of power and dominance, and more importantly, with anti-sexism and anti-racism action" ("The Groundings"). We present our reflections working in Projeto Yabas to illustrate the potential of such approaches and to provoke further thought and discussion on the possibilities and limitations of Black feminism within hip hop.

Hip Hop in Recife

The hip hop movement carries with it a strong critique against racism, social inequalities, as well as a practice of denouncing oppression. In Recife, hip hop first emerged during the 1980s with street dancing (*Rodas de Break*) in the city center, localized around the public park, Parque 13 de Maio, and on Rua do Hospício. Today, hip hop includes large numbers of participants in each of the movement's elements.¹ Most hip hop participants in Recife are Black youths from low-income families and residents of the urban periphery. The majority of these participants are male; however, there are women and girls participating in all hip hop activities, especially break dancing.

The hip hop scene in Pernambuco is characterized by the inclusion of regional Black culture. B-boys and b-girls incorporate elements of *capoeira* and *frevo* in their performance, and rappers include aspects of *embolada*, *coco*, *maracatu*, and *afoxé*.² As Silvia Barreto highlights, another factor that distinguishes rap produced in Recife is the use of other instruments, such as the electric guitar, drum kits and other percussion, along with the beat produced by the DJ (92). Songs frequently reference political action, community organization, drugs, violence, Blackness, critiques of the myth of racial democracy, and hip hop as a path to salvation. Barreto suggests that “A rede hip-hop local se apresenta pontuada por núcleos mais coesos, que por hora experimentam canais de interlocução com o poder público” (Local hip hop networks appear as cohesive units that are experimenting, at this moment, with channels of communication with the government; 15). Hip hop participants organize themselves into associations, collectives, posses, groups, crews, and NGOs that promote activities that employ hip hop as a pedagogical tool. From these organizations, hip hop activists and artists interfere with the local realities and demand the inclusion of hip hop in the development and implementation of public policies for youth in the city.

Among the many hip hop organizations active in Recife, a few have distinguished themselves via their sheer numbers or the impact they have had on the hip hop scene. These include the Associação Metropolitana de Hip Hop de Pernambuco (Metropolitan Hip Hop Association of Pernambuco), composed largely of rappers, but also graffiti artists and b-boys and b-girls as well as a significant number of social movement activists; the Coletivo Êxito de Rua (Street Success Collective), which includes mainly graffiti artists; the Brigada Hip Hop (Hip Hop Brigade), a group of b-boys and b-girls; and the Coletivo Flores Crew (Flowers Crew Collective), a group comprised of graffiti artists and activists in feminist and Black movements. These organizations understand that hip hop has an important social and political function which includes building links and partnerships with other social movements and NGOs. They organize seminars, workshops, conferences, and open dialogue sessions (*rodas de conversa*) to address a variety of issues, including political consciousness, Black identity, gender relations, homophobia, as well as strategies for denouncing and confronting racism, building an economy of solidarity, and promoting social movements within a capitalist society. To achieve these goals,

the hip hop organizations forge alliances and partnerships with a variety of social movements, such as the Black movement, the feminist movement, and the Landless Workers Movement (MST), among others.

In Recife, several large non-governmental organizations such as Cores do Amanhã, Instituto Vida, and Pé no Chão realized the pedagogical potential of hip hop and developed significant programs including classes in street dancing, rhyming (rapping), graffiti and DJing. For example, Instituto Vida trained more than 90 students in break dancing and over 200 in graffiti arts. UNESCO's 2002 report, which suggested that elements of hip hop be incorporated into youth programs and policies, caught the attention of both NGOs and the Brazilian government. In Recife, this prompted the implementation of the program Escola Aberta (Open School), which consists of 400 public schools in the state that offer weekend activities for students, including break dance and graffiti (Barreto 158).

The hip hop movement has influenced youth policy in the city via its involvement in participatory budgeting at the municipal level and by encouraging and mobilizing youths to vote for and participate in the development and implementation of youth programs and policies. For example, in 2012, the municipality approved the establishment of the Casa do Hip Hop, a reference center for hip hop activities in the city. Additionally, the movement has representatives in the Culture Council, the Youth Council, and the Council on Terça de Resistência Negra (Black Resistance Tuesday).

Yabas

Yabas is a female rap duo from the Santo Amaro community in Recife. Karina and Rose formed the group in 2007 (Fig. 1). They are one of the few all-female rap groups in Recife. Rose and Karina view hip hop as a powerful medium conducive to representing Black women's strength and agency. Initially, hip hop afforded a space for Karina and Rose to engage in processes of self-making and negotiate lived experiences of racial and sexual violence. More recently, Rose and Karina are utilizing hip hop as a vehicle to expand their social and political activism, such as denouncing embedded forms of racism and misogyny. Hip hop—more than other Black musical genres—is especially well suited for developing these kinds of Black political

subjectivities because it is fundamentally concerned with representing daily realities (Buridick 72-73), diasporic identity articulation, and social movement activism.



Figure 1. Yabas, Karina (left) and Rose (right). Photo by José Cleiton Carbonel.

Derived from the Yoruba word *iyáàgbà*, *yabas* (also spelled *yábás*, *iabás*, *iyabás*) is frequently translated as *Mãe Rainha* (Mother Queen) in Portuguese, and refers in general to all of the female *orixás*. However, Karina and Rose did not choose the name to allude to Afro-matrix religions per se. Rather, they associate Yabas with an image of Black women warriors. They explain that, initially, the group did not have a name; people began to call them “Antônias,” referencing the film starring Brazilian hip hop star Negra Li.³ Karina explains that she did not like this name, especially because her grandmother was named Antônia. Without ideas, they searched the internet for stories of strong women who “made history” (“fizerem a historia”). They encountered a story about three Black women who mobilized their community

(a *quilombo*) to defend against an invasion (by Europeans). The women led and won the battle. The title of the story was “Yabas.”

Rose and Karina identified with the story and took the name Yabas as an appropriate title for their group. Afterwards, through conversations with other Black activists, they learned of the connection to Afro-matrix religions. They continue to use the name and spelling, “Yabas,” distinguishing themselves from the Yoruba-influenced spellings and pronunciation (i.e., an open accent on the final ‘a’—*iyabás*). Thus, they emphasize a history of Black resistance and women leaders while simultaneously neither fully embracing nor rejecting associations with Afro-matrix religions in Brazil.

Yabas: Project Design

Yabas and a group of activists working on an arts-education program for vulnerable youth (PROTEJO) in Santo Amaro came together to design a project around Yabas’ music and activism. They created the project in response to the Ministry of Culture (MinC) announcing funding for artistic and cultural development projects for youth in Santo Amaro. Santo Amaro is a large city district located just north of Recife’s city center (Fig. 2). Within this district is the Santo Amaro *favela*, an extremely vulnerable community that suffers from poverty, a lack of infrastructure, and violence related to drug trafficking and police action, as well as domestic, sexual, and symbolic violence (Fig. 3). We use Santo Amaro to refer specifically to the *favela*. As Samuel Araújo remarks, residents of such communities suffer from “century-old social prejudice and stereotypes”—e.g., marked as poor, uneducated, and criminal by the larger populace (“Sound” 222).

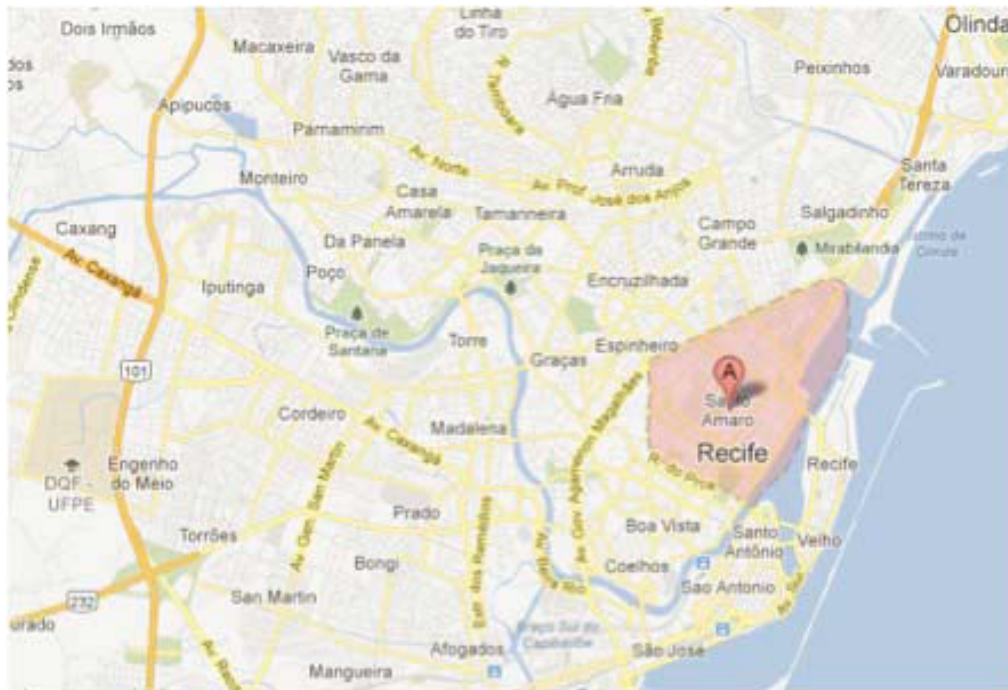


Figure 2. The Santo Amaro district (shaded in pink) just north of Recife's center (red circle). Google Maps.



Figure 3. Santo Amaro District, with the "favela" shaded in blue. Google Maps.

Rose, Karina, and the activists met throughout December 2010 to design a project that would strengthen the “artistic protagonism” of Yabas, that is, use their music as a point of departure for community activism against racial and sexual violence. The goal of the project was to use hip hop as a participatory pedagogical tool to facilitate young women’s conceptualization of themselves as Black women and to recognize and combat racial, sexual, and domestic violence. The original project had four components:

1. Race and Gender Workshops: Through a series of eight workshops, the project sought to reinforce critical understandings of racial identity and gender issues to facilitate self-empowerment and deployment of successful resistance strategies for fighting racialized and gendered violence. The workshops were to be comprised of about 25 young Black women from Santo Amaro.
2. CD of Yabas Music: The production and distribution of a CD of Yabas’ music would serve the project in two main ways: 1) Yabas had not yet recorded a complete album of their own music.⁴ Thus, the only way at the time to hear their music was to attend live performances. This complicated access to their songs and political project because drug trafficking has divided Santo Amaro into rival sections. If Yabas perform in one territory, residents from another section might not be able to attend for fear of violent reprisals from rival organizations.⁵ Enacting music as a means to demonstrate alternative realities wherein rival territories can be linked in various ways is part of Yabas’ overall political project. Distribution of a CD of recorded music supports this goal and increases the accessibility of Yabas’ music and activism. 2) Members envisioned the CD as a pedagogical tool for future workshops. Songs could be incorporated into discussion sessions about a variety of themes ranging from sexual violence, racism, and Blackness to power, identity, feminism, and citizenship.
3. DVD Documentary: This was designed to record the activities of the project and strengthen its goals by promoting community participation. A group of students from Santo Amaro, trained by PROTEJO’s Video Course, agreed to film the documentary. It would promote images of the community’s participatory activism and collective resistance to sexual abuse. It would also be an instructional tool to be

distributed (along with the CD and a booklet) to the various youth-oriented organizations in Santo Amaro.

4. Booklet: The final objective of the project was the production and distribution of an informational booklet that discusses the key ideas from the workshops. The booklets would use music as a point of departure to address issues of identity, empowerment, and collective resistance. The aim was to articulate clearly the major themes presented artistically in the music, consolidate these discussions in a concise format, and aide and guide interpretations, reflections, and interactions. Taken together, these materials would offer a range of pedagogical potential for initiating and maintaining programs that address sexual abuse.

Funding Projeto Yabas

The activists and musicians involved in Projeto Yabas live in various parts of the greater Recife metropolitan area (only Rose and Karina are residents of Santo Amaro), so coordinating meetings proved difficult. Moreover, project proposals had to be submitted to MinC online, and this required arranging meetings at internet cafes in Recife's city center. Such logistical difficulties contributed to the project not being finalized until the very day applications were due, December 30, 2010. Unfortunately, the MinC website was not working properly when the activists attempted to submit the project proposal. With the deadline fast approaching, the group tried desperately to contact MinC but received no response from the technical support staff. They emailed MinC, explaining the situation and asking for authorization to submit the proposal as a Word document, which they had attached to the email. On January 2nd, 2011, they received an email declaring that the project was officially received. In late January, MinC notified Karina via telephone that the project was preapproved. And by February, MinC's website listed the project as preapproved.

Viviane Santiago served as principal organizer of Projeto Yabas. She works as an educational coordinator and is a Black activist in Recife's hip hop community. She was one of several individuals who were working with PROTEJO in Santo Amaro that formed the initial team of Projeto Yabas. In March, after discussing the matter with the rest of the team, Viviane

suggested that Cory participate in the project as well because of his training in ethnomusicology and Pan African studies, his commitment to fighting racism and anti-Black violence, and his interest in the role of music contributing to Afro-Diasporic resistance movements. Cory secured additional funding for the project through a Summer Activist Research Grant from the Social Justice Institute (SJI) of the University of Texas at Austin.⁶ In the original budget, we allocated this funding for printing the booklet.

At the end of April, MinC published on their website a complete list of all the project proposals to be funded in the state of Pernambuco that included each project's graded evaluation. Our project was ranked 12th. At the end of May, MinC released a final list of projects that stated when the funds would be released. To our surprise, Projeto Yabas was not on the list; we had been replaced by another project previously ranked much lower than ours.

We quickly contacted MinC, who initially claimed that they never received our project proposal. After we produced the emails proving that our project was not only received but listed as preapproved, MinC countered that our project was mistakenly placed on the list; they had confused it with another project. Ours was the only project with "Yabas" in the title; and how then, could they explain the phone calls to Karina? MinC finally relented and acknowledged that our project was indeed preapproved; however, because of an unexplainable error, our project would not be funded. We suspect that recent elections shifted political party alliances within MinC and as a result, certain projects ranked lower than ours were funded over Projeto Yabas.

Reformulating the Project

The disrespect shown to us by MinC in Recife had a demoralizing impact for the group. Most members were unemployed, had been denied unemployment compensation when they lost their jobs, and now also lost remuneration for work in Projeto Yabas. Most had difficulties even discussing these issues. After some time, a few of us continued with the initiative and attempted to decide how best to use the limited SJI funds.

We considered organizing a day, or possibly an entire weekend, of workshops on race and gender that would be concluded with a concert by Yabas. However, it was agreed that such

a reduced period of exposure would have a limited impact for the youths involved. After a long process of discussing and debating potential “plan Bs,” we finally decided, in late July, on a project that focused its energies on the artistic and social protagonism of Yabas. The reformulated project included three interrelated components: 1) producing a CD of Yabas music; 2) organizing a series of dialogical reflection sessions featuring Karina and Rose; and 3) organizing a CD release concert. We drew on networks of local hip hop activists to achieve these goals.

Producing the CD

Hip hop producer, Tufão, agreed to record the album for half price; he produced the music tracks (*as bases*) for free, charging us only for the actual recording (fig. 4). Tufão and Yabas finished recording the CD in just two and a half months. Graffiti artist, José Cleiton Carbonel, shot the cover photos free of charge. Cory assumed the role of graphic artist by designing the album covers and liner notes (figs. 5 and 6).



Figure 4. Tufão in his Studio. Photo by Cory LaFevers.

Distributing the CDs with copies of the lyrics, while more costly, was an important goal for the project. Providing the lyrics insured another form of access to the content addressed in the music, increasing the pedagogical potential of the CD. With dwindling funds, we produced 1,000 CD cases and inserts and only 100 CDs. This is significant because the cases and inserts are only printed in runs of 1,000 units at a cost that would be prohibitive for Yabas to reprint at a later date. CDs, on the other hand, can be printed in any number at any time (1 *real* apiece). Thus, we managed to include the lyrics and insure materials for continued distribution of the CD. Carbonel, along with his production team, Mangue Crew, produced (at no charge) a music video of the song “Desabafo Feminino” (Women’s Disburden). The full album is available for download and streaming at: <http://palcomp3.com/yabas>. The video is also available at palcomp3.com and via the *alter/nativas* journal in <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8rFGDonHBY>.



Figure 5. CD Front Cover: *Yabas, A força que a mulher tem EM COMUM* (Yabas, The Strength that Women have IN COMMON) October, 2011.



Figure 6: Back Cover of CD: *Yabas, A força que a mulher tem EM COMUM* (Yabas, The Strength that Women have IN COMMON) October, 2011.

CD Release Performance

The CD release concert occurred on Tuesday, October 11, 2011, at Terça Negra (Black Tuesday), a weekly performance of Black music held at the historic Pátio de São Pedro in Recife. Terça Negra was established in 2001 as a joint effort between the Movimento Negro Unificado (Unified Black Movement, or MNU), the Núcleo Cultural Afro-Brasileiro (Afro-Brazilian Cultural Center, or NCAB), and Recife's municipal government. Each week, the MNU presents three or four musical groups playing Afro-Brazilian or Afro-Diasporic music. MNU activists speak before the music starts and in-between performances, informing the crowd about presentations of Afro-Brazilian culture, lectures, and similar activities.



Figure 7. Yabas performing at the CD Release Show, Terça Negra, October 11, 2011. Photo by Xicco Limma.

Terça Negra is a space/place negotiated through the struggles of Recife's Black activists. Before Terça Negra, activists and musical groups gathered on Thursday and Friday nights at a small *pagode samba* hotspot called Pagode de Didi located in another section of the city. It was only afterwards that the MNU moved the gatherings to Pátio de São Pedro and the night changed to Tuesday. The driving force behind the move was the desire to establish a

permanent space/place for Afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations outside of the established spaces and places, such as Carnaval and *favelas*. Alzenide Simões explains that the idea was “não deixar pegar o público que vem do gueto e que ele deve ficar no gueto. Se ele sai do gueto, vem pra o centro da cidade... [isso iria] mostrar a verdadeira cara do Recife... Onde é que estão os negros dessa cidade? Estão aqui ó. Nós estamos em todos os lugares. Não só tem negro lá no gueto” (not to get the public to go to the ghetto and for the performers to stay in the ghetto. If [the performer] left the ghetto, came to the city center... [it would] demonstrate the true face of Recife... Where are the Blacks in this city? They’re here, look. We are everywhere. Blacks are not only over there in the ghetto; LaFevers, *Sounds* 107).



Figure 8: Yabas Performing at CD Release Show, Terça Negra, October 11, 2011. Note the Pátio de São Pedro is full of spectators. Photo by Xicco Limma.

Logistically, Terça Negra allowed us to tap into a pre-existing infrastructure. We did not have to rent a stage or hire a sound manager. Holding the CD release show at Terça-Negra contributed to the objectives of the project in that it provided a high level of visibility for the

group and their social and artistic protagonism. Yabas' CD release performance contributed to an entire month of Terça Negra programming that showcased hip hop. The concert was extremely well attended, and many residents of Santo Amaro were present.

Dialogic Reflection: Black Women's Self-making and Political Subjectivity

The dialogic reflection sessions represented a crucial component of Projeto Yabas. Sessions were held weekly from July through the end of October 2011, and can be broadly categorized into two different moments. Early sessions focused on designing and implementing Projeto Yabas and recording the CD. We discussed how cultural citizenship and funding agencies (public and private) contribute to folklorized images and sounds of Blackness. We discussed "collaboration" and which hip hop producer to approach about recording the album. For example, we questioned with what other artists a given producer worked; how they positioned themselves in the misogynist world of hip hop; and what did they seek to gain by working with us. Reflecting upon these questions influenced our decision to work with Tufão over other possible producers.

Later discussion sessions focused on creating spaces of dialogue, reflection, and support for Rose, Karina, and Viviane as Black women living in a racist and sexist society. Cory did not participate in these sessions because he felt that his positionality as a White male would be detrimental to the effectiveness of the sessions. Discussion topics were generated by Karina and Rose and covered a wide range of issues, concerns, and questions. Viviane served as facilitator and mentor. Rose, Karina, and Viviane perceived the dialogue as extremely important for them in terms of self-making and strengthening their artistic and political protagonism.

We want to stress the inherent power in Black women sharing experiences. These reflection sessions, and engagement with hip hop more broadly, have been essential to Rose and Karina's processes of Black women self-making. Following Black feminist theorists such as bell hooks, we argue that these processes are fundamental for Black women's political activism. bell hooks identifies three interwoven processes involved in what she refers to as "coming to voice," a metaphor for processes of self-making that enable political subjectivity for Black women. These include breaking silence about oppression, developing self-reflexive speech, and

confronting by speaking out against, or “talking back,” to elite discourse (*Yearning*). Patricia Hill Collins suggests that these processes “remain essential for Black women’s journey from objectification to full human subjectivity” (*Fighting* 47). Collins elaborates, “breaking silence enables individual African-American women to reclaim humanity in a system that gains part of its strength by objectifying Black women” (47).

The process of “coming to voice” started for Yabas through conversations with Viviane while cooking dinner, braiding hair, mending clothes, and other daily activities. Rose, Karina, and Viviane, in talking about their week, ended up discussing their personal experiences dealing with sexual advances in the buses and on the street, feelings of vulnerability walking in the streets at night, sexual harassment in the workplace, the arrogance of their White, middle-class employers, and the dynamics of the relationships with their partners, boyfriends, and husbands. They shared strategies used to cope with these situations and offered advice to each other based on their experiences. This connects with what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as “Black women’s collective wisdom” (*Black* 24). Similarly, Keisha-Khan Y. Perry’s work in Brazil illustrates how sharing these experiences allow Black women to “[develop] a collective social critique of gendered, class-based racism” (“Politics” 206).

Many Black Brazilian women’s struggles with self-image and beauty center around their hair. As Kia Lilly Caldwell indicates, “despite differences in experiences, many women [undergo] a process of acceptance that require[s] them to reassess the social stigma associated with having *cabelo crespo*” (*Negras in Brazil* 90). At the beginning of Projeto Yabas, Viviane had long natural hair that she describes as *cabelo crespo*, whereas Karina and Rose had straightened hair. During conversation, Rose asked Viviane, “O que você acha quando pessoas falam ‘cabelo ruim’?” (What do you think when people say ‘bad hair’?) This initiated a process of deconstructing notions of beauty and hair tied to European features, accessing images of Black beauty, and reconnecting with their own natural features in a positive sense.

Rose and Karina became curious to see and discover their own natural hair. Both started to braid their hair and use natural treatments to hydrate and moisturize it. Rose, who had long hair, impatiently decided to get an exceedingly short hair-cut. She said that even though she felt strange with short hair, she felt truly free. Rose became invested in bringing that awareness

to her friends and started a campaign on Facebook. She says that she is not judging people who decide to straighten their hair; after all, she had done so for years. Instead, she is trying to show her friends that the notion of bad hair is socially constructed by a racist society that demeans the Black population, and to encourage them to challenge their understanding of a beauty standard tied to straight hair. Subsequently, Yabas have written a song about their pride in their “Cabelo crespo”:

Cresce meu cabelo duro	Grow out my hard hair
Cresce meu cabelo crespo	Grow out my kinky hair
Da favela somos porta-voz	We are the spokesperson of the favela

Through their conversations, Karina, Rose, and Viviane realized that they were all dealing with stress-related health problems. During one discussion, Viviane’s sister came to talk with them and share her experience of having two stress-related strokes by the age of twenty-eight. Her doctors told her that having survived without any permanent damage was a miracle. Reflecting on these issues, they realized that none of them pursued moments for self-care activities—they were just too busy working, studying, organizing and taking care of their brothers, sisters, and nephews.

As Keisha-Khan Y. Perry’s work illustrates, Black women frequently negotiate the tensions between self-care (individual rights) and the need to care for others, often placing the needs of the collective before their own (“Politics” 208-211). Analena Hope suggests that “breaking these cycles of abuse begins with an intentional self-care practice, and a recognition that we, too, deserve to thrive and be well... But I can’t wait for the revolution to begin taking care of myself. It is imperative that I make space for these things now” (“Can I live?”). They decided to make time to do little activities that help them decompress and become healthier. Together they started jogging, and during this time, allowed themselves to have fun, talk, and laugh. Additionally, Karina started playing with a *maracatu* and Rose took classes to learn how to braid hair. All of them revisited their diet and became more conscious of the signs their bodies would give to indicate stress and fatigue.

During the discussions, thinking about themselves as artists, Rose and Karina started to realize that they were making a commitment to something much bigger than just rapping. They

began to understand themselves as activists and to think about the way in which their performance on stage would help or compromise their activism. They considered the impact of clothing and dancing during performances. They wanted to be free to express themselves sexually, to talk about sexual and reproductive rights, but at the same time they did not want to reinforce negative images of hypersexual Black women or contribute to misogyny in hip hop. They reflected on whether they would support misogyny in hip hop by dancing to a song with a fantastic beat, but lyrics that demean women. In thinking through these issues, we drew from Tricia Rose's observations:

I am concerned about Black women's overall freedom and equality. This involves genuine sexual freedom of expression—not freedom of expression tied to sexist male fantasies or to male-dominated sex trades in which women are demeaned and degraded in order to appear to be sexually free. Nor does it involve women's sexual repression—a returning to sexual domination of women through sexual repression in the interests of patriarchal male control. Sexual explicitness does not have to be sexually exploitative. If we don't make this distinction when we fight against the constant barrage of 'there are bitches and hoes,' then we wind up with a sexually repressive call for less sexuality. (183-184)

Involvement in hip hop has been a transformative process for Karina and Rose; it has helped them gain an understanding of themselves as Black women in a racist and sexist society, and to evaluate the ways in which racism and sexism have shaped their identities. As Keisha-Khan Y. Perry reiterates, "reconstructing political identities based on their own understanding of themselves as Black is a source of Black women's empowerment necessary for political action" ("Social Memory" 21). Again, notions of "coming to voice" are evident in the trajectories of Yabas. For Karina and Rose, "coming to voice" also includes engaging in processes of healing from sexual abuses and racial violence via their participation in hip hop. Patricia Hill Collins explains,

by speaking out, formerly victimized individuals not only reclaim their humanity, they simultaneously empower themselves by giving new meaning to their own experiences. Racism, poverty, sexism, and heterosexism all harm their victims. For individuals,

healing from this harm by making one's experiences and point of view public remains one of the most fundamental contributions of breaking silence. (*Fighting* 48)

Such healing processes can be heard in the title track of the album “Em Comum” (In Common). The song begins with Karina sharing her story of being raped. She speaks over a string ostinato and the crackling sounds of hi-fi record static that represents memory and the past. Her voice is calm and determined, yet soft and quiet; her language—at times erratic and vague—indicates her pain:

Em 2004 quando eu tinha 15 anos tava perto de fazer 16 anos eu vim de um show que minha família, minhas amigas e meus amigos me pediram para eu não ir e na volta a partir do horário não tinha mais ônibus aí eu vim sozinha desse determinado lugar pra casa e eu fui andando. E no trajeto encontrei um homem que pegou na minha mão com violência, apertou minha mão e disse que eu não fizesse gestos, não olhasse pra ninguém, tipo eu não identificasse que eu não conhecia ele, era pra agir como se eu conhecesse ele. Chegou lá começou a dizer que eu era linda, que eu era gostosa, que queria transar comigo, e eu disse a ele que eu não queria que eu tinha acabado de sofrer um aborto, tinha nem um mês que eu tinha acabado de sofrer um aborto espontâneo e aí eu tava a maior deprê, tipo eu queria fazer de tudo pra me distrair, me divertir, e aí aconteceu isso, o pior ele me estuprou e eu não consegui falar isso pra ninguém porque eu fiquei com vergonha e com medo de ser [julgada], poucas pessoas sabem disso...⁷

(In 2004, when I was 15, about to turn 16, I came from a show that my family, my friends, had asked me not to go to, and afterwards on the way back, there were no more buses. I went back alone, from there to my house, and I went walking. On the way, I met a man who grabbed my hand violently. He squeezed my hand and told me not to make any gestures, not to look at anybody, like not to indicate that I didn't know him. I was to act as if I knew him. When we got there he started to say that I was pretty, that I was hot, that he wanted to have sex with me, and I told him that I didn't want to, that I just miscarried. It hadn't been even a month since I suffered a miscarriage, and I was really sad, like wanting to do everything to distract myself, to have fun, and then it

happened. The worst, he raped me and I couldn't tell anybody because I was embarrassed and afraid to be judged. Few people know about this...)

She is crying as she finishes the story. Participating in dialogic reflection sessions with Rose and Viviane influenced Karina's decision to "break the silence" and share her story on the album.

Karina overcomes debilitating feelings of fear and guilt to recount her experience; then, along with Rose, she uses her voice to claim citizenship rights, denounce the existing system of law enforcement and prosecution as ineffective, and to encourage other women to speak out against pedophilia and domestic violence. Forty-eight seconds into Karina's story, the melodic lines of the beat replace the string ostinato as the crackling vinyl fades away. At 1:09 minutes, the song begins with a statement of the refrain (<https://soundcloud.com/alter-nativas/in-comum-mu-sica-master-ok>):

Terra adorada entre outras mil	Beloved land, amongst a thousand others
A cada dia aumenta o abuso	Everyday child abuse increases
infantil no Brasil	in Brazil
Terra adorada, terra adorada	Beloved land, beloved land

Yabas make obvious reference to Brazil's National Anthem:

Terra adorada	Beloved land,
Entre outras mil	amongst a thousand others
És tu, Brasil,	It is you, Brazil
Ó Pátria amada	O beloved homeland

This reference suggests that pedophilia is a national problem and implicates the state for failing to act effectively to prevent it. Excerpts from the first verse, rapped by Rose, illustrate Yabas' strategy of using their voices as a form of expression and a vehicle to demand and claim their rights:

Indignação, este é meu sentimento	Indignation, that is my feeling
Quando vejo um caso desses	When I see a case like this, I am
me dá um tormento	tormented
O som da minha voz é meu grito de	The sound of my voice is my scream of
protesto	protest

Contra esses casos até de incesto... Against such cases, even incest...

Practices of self-making as Black women directly influence the political activism of Yabas in a manner that echoes Audre Lorde's reflection, "I love the word survival, it always sounds to me like a promise. It makes me wonder sometimes though, how do I define the shape of my impact upon this earth?" (qtd. in Gumbs). Rose and Karina believe that their position as hip hop artists, as survivors of sexual violence, and as outspoken activists—a positionality explicit in their music—all contribute to their being recognized as mentors by women in Santo Amaro.

One example is Dandara,⁸ a young woman from Santo Amaro who had known Karina and Rose prior to Projeto Yabas. She attended the CD release show and was familiar with Yabas' music. The week of the CD release concert, she was the victim of a "date" rape. The next morning Dandara approached Yabas for advice. Significantly, Karina and Rose claim that she did not come to them simply because they too had been victims of sexual violence, as if to be comforted; rather, she was looking for information on how to file charges and exercise her rights. She knew that Rose and Karina could help. That day, they took Dandara to the hospital and the police station. The following day, they took her to the Centro de Referência Clarice Lispector (Clarice Lispector Reference Center), an organization that provides judicial and psychosocial support and counseling to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

It is also significant that the man involved in the rape was a prominent member of Recife's hip hop movement. In an effort to understand what happened, Yabas talked with other (male) members of the hip hop community who were present at the party. They attempted to dissuade Yabas from encouraging Dandara to press charges, arguing that the man who committed the rape is "a brother" (*"o cara é brother"*) and *"ele cola com a gente"* (a member of the hip hop community). Despite these arguments and conflicting feelings, Rose and Karina made the decision to help Dandara file charges based on the conversations that took place during Projeto Yabas' reflection sessions. Their actions echo bell hooks's comment, "Black females must not be duped into supporting shit that hurts us under the guise of standing beside our men. If Black men are betraying us through acts of male violence, we save ourselves and the race by resisting" (*"Misogyny"*).

This incident strengthened Rose and Karina's activism, including their knowledge of rights, legal processes, and support networks in Recife. They began to approach other young Black women in Santo Amaro who were either victims of sexual and domestic violence or acting in a manner that Yabas viewed as disempowering and replicating a racist and sexist imaginary of how Black Brazilian women should behave. That is, Karina and Rose felt compelled to act as mentors and illustrate other possibilities for these adolescents. The women they approached were already familiar with their music and activism. Dialogue initiated by Yabas continues and has resulted in a number of these youths becoming active participants in various community organizations in Santo Amaro.

Despite its difficulties and limitations, Projeto Yabas successfully achieved its goal of enhancing the social protagonism of Rose and Karina as hip hop artists and community activists. This includes expanding their public and the reach of their message. The release of their CD brought considerable exposure for the group. Rose and Karina sold the entire original run of CDs within a month of its release and continue to produce and sell CDs. Increased attention to the music of Yabas began prior to the CD release show when the group debuted material from the album at the Pre-Esporte do Mangue festival on September 4, 2011. Esporte do Mangue is one of the largest festivals of alternative youth culture (including music) in Recife. A series of "pre" festivals showcase youth performances from each of the city's districts. The festival organizers select the best acts to present at the final festival. Yabas' performance was strong and they were invited to perform during the final Esporte do Mangue event (March 1-3, 2012) alongside the festival headliner, nationally famous rapper Emcida.⁹ The festival organizers informed Yabas that, in addition to the artistic quality of their performance, the subject matter addressed in their music was a deciding factor in their selection. Additionally, the festival organizers are releasing a compilation CD with songs from all of the artists. Sharing a bill—as well as a forthcoming CD—with a rapper as famous as Emcida marks a massive achievement in Yabas' career. The success of these performances (Pre-Esporte do Mangue, the CD release party at Terça-Negra, and Esporte do Mangue Festival) prompted further attention in a news report and interview with Yabas that aired on SBT Television.¹⁰

Yabas continue to “talk back” to racist and sexist discourses in myriad ways. For example, when approached with collaborative recording and performing opportunities, Rose demanded to review song lyrics, make changes, and refused to work with certain people. However, she went beyond simply refusing to work with them; she engaged those individuals about their politics. Rose’s discussions with one male hip hop artist facilitated his own protagonism and altered his stance on collaborating with misogynist musicians in Recife. Before engaging in dialogue with Rose, he simply had not given it much thought.

Additionally, Yabas have become more active advocates for Black women within the hip hop movement in Recife. They participated in meetings and roundtable discussions—FloreSendo Ideas (Flowering/Being Ideas, October 27-30, 2011) and Máfia do Batom (Lipstick Mafia, August 24-26, 2012)¹¹—dedicated to the promotion of the work of Black women, as well as strategies to confront racism and sexism within the movement. Additionally, Yabas entered into a partnership with the feminist NGO SOS Corpo-Instituto Feminista para a Democracia (SOS Body: Feminist Institute for Democracy) to develop strategies and actions (grounded in hip hop) to confront domestic violence and abortion rights in Pernambuco. This collaboration has already resulted in the recording of a new song to be used by SOS Corpo in promotional and pedagogical activities.

Conclusions

Projeto Yabas was limited in its scope; the final project, as well as the initial project design, is far from a large-scale and sustained community project. Despite these shortcomings, Projeto Yabas had immediate and expansive results. Producing and distributing an album of Yabas’ music, coupled with dialogic reflection sessions, contributed significantly to Rose and Karina’s artistic and political protagonism. As a result, Rose and Karina have been able—at least on a limited scale—to facilitate young Black women’s conceptualization of themselves as Black women and to work toward combating racism and sexual and domestic violence.

While Yabas are not grassroots leaders of a community organization in Santo Amaro, Keisha-Kahn Y. Perry reminds us of the importance of recognizing the various forms and cumulative effects of Black women’s daily resistance, which is not always about the

“empowerment and improvement of [their communities], but also about reinventing themselves as Black women and realizing their own *projetos de vida*, their own ‘personal life projects’” (“Politics” 205). As discussed, Projeto Yabas contributed significantly to Rose and Karina’s emergence as references for other women in Santo Amaro. Focusing on their *projetos de vida* helped Rose and Karina increase their interaction with community members, an important step in developing larger collaborative grassroots initiatives.

A large number of Black women activists in the hip hop movement in Recife structure their activism on theories learned through interactions with activists in the Brazilian feminist movement. However, we agree with Lélia Gonzalez’s assessment that the Brazilian feminist movement maintains a strong Eurocentric inclination that erases the central role of race in gender hierarchies. The experiences of Projeto Yabas indicate the potential for utilizing Black feminist theory within the hip hop movement in Pernambuco. For this reason, more research into the possibilities of Black feminist thought for Black women activists in Recife is urgently needed, including analyses of cultural citizenship initiatives.

The hip hop movement in Recife has mobilized the community to dialogue and negotiate with the municipality. In Brazil, participatory political structures are organized around the Habermasian notion of the Public Sphere, and are designed to guarantee the individual rights of the White middle-class. Black Brazilians are viewed as a group, having been denied the individual subjectivity extended to Whites which allows access to first-class citizenship. Thus, based on our engagement with the work of Black feminist scholars Patricia Hill Collins and Sueli Carneiro, we understand that public participatory political structures relegate Blacks to a group-based second-class citizenship from which Black women are doubly excluded (Carneiro 49; Collins, *From* 178-183).

We believe that gains for Blacks in the public sphere do not effect significant social change. To what extent is the notion of citizenship being extended to Black Brazilians superficial citizenship? We suggest that scholarship on hip hop in Brazil should incorporate the contributions of Black feminist thought in an effort to analyze the issue of cultural citizenship rights and to examine the kinds of citizenship possible for Blacks—and especially Black women—via participatory public politics.

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Notes

¹ In Recife, the hip hop movement follows Afrika Bambaataa's conceptualization of hip hop as having five elements: rap, DJing, graffiti, street dance, and knowledge.

² B-boys and b-girls in Recife often incorporate elements from the regional, traditional Afro-Brazilian dance forms of *capoeira*—a kind of Afro-Brazilian martial arts—and *frevo*—the traditional carnival music and dance of Recife which makes use of highly energetic dance steps and acrobatic jumps. *Embolada* is a Northeastern song style where performers improvise tongue-twisting verses accompanied by *pandeiro*, an Afro-Brazilian hand drum similar to the tambourine. *Embolada*, along with the *repente* style, which is usually accompanied by the *viola* (a small, 10-stringed guitar), is part of the Northeastern tradition of improvised *cantoria* (sung poetry). These traditions are frequently invoked in Northeastern hip hop. See Murphy 148-149. *Coco* is an Afro-Brazilian song and dance form from the Northeast. Many *coco* songs feature a tongue-twister *embolada* section. *Maracatu* is an Afro-Pernambucan carnival procession (music and dance) that has close ties to Afro-matrix religions. It is often broken into two separate styles, *maracatu de nação* (aka *maracatu de baque virado*) and *maracatu rural* (aka *maracatu de baque solto*). *Afoxé* is a secular form of Afro-matrix religious music.

³ The film tells the fictional story of a group of four Black women hip hop artists living in São Paulo. *Antônia*. 2006. Directed by Tata Amaral. Globo Filmes.

⁴ Previously, they had only recorded two tracks that appeared on a compilation of new hip hop artists produced by Zé Brown. *Zé Brown apresenta Talentos*. Recife, 2010.

⁵ Samuel Araújo has written about similar conditions in Rio de Janeiro: "An individual who crosses these boundaries risks his or her life, as happens when a resident who lives in a sub-area controlled by a given comando [sic] goes to a party in a neighboring place under another one's control, or when relatives are separated simply by living in areas controlled by different organizations" ("Conflict" 294).

⁶ Engaged scholarship continues to be a source of contention in academia. One of the primary debates surrounds notions of objectivity, which is often an overly simplified and forced dichotomy between "pure" and "applied" research. And while negotiating the numerous—and at times oppositional—interests of scholars and activists is no easy task, there is a growing body of literature that points to the invaluable insights that activist research can produce. Ethnomusicologists have devoted considerable attention to the topic—commonly referred to as applied ethnomusicology—in recent years. Significantly, much of this new literature addresses the broadening scope of applied and collaborative research in music scholarship and predicts that applied ethnomusicology will play an increasingly important role in the future of the discipline. For more on engaged or activist scholarship in the social sciences generally, see Charles R. Hale, *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (2008). For applied ethnomusicology, see Gregory Barz, "Advocacy—Activism Responsibility and the Ethnomusicologist" (2012); Rebecca Dirksen, "Reconsidering Theory and Practice in Ethnomusicology: Applying, Advocating, and Engaging Beyond Academia" (2012); Klisala Harrison, "Epistemologies of Applied Ethnomusicology" (2012); Klisala Harrison et al., *Applied Ethnomusicology: Historical and Contemporary Approaches* (2010); Cory LaFevers, *Critical Reflections on Applied Ethnomusicology and Activist Scholarship* (2012); Maureen Louhgran, "'But what if they call the police?' Applied Ethnomusicology and Urban Activism in the United States" (2008); John Morgan O'Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, eds., *Music and Conflict* (2010); Victoria Rogers, "John Blacking: Social and Political Activist" (2012); Anthony Seeger, "Forged in the Crucible of Action" (2008); Jeff Todd Titon, "SEM Applied Ethnomusicology Section" (2012); Kathleen J. Van Buren, "Applied Ethnomusicology and HIV and AIDS: Responsibility, Ability, and Action" (2010).

⁷ Punctuation and spelling are reproduced as they appear in the CD inserts. The only exception is that "*humilhada*" (humiliated) has been correctly transcribed as "*julgada*" (judged).

⁸ A pseudonym.

⁹ <http://brigadahiphop-pe.blogspot.com/2012/02/esporte-do-mangue-2012-com-emicida.html> (accessed October 20, 2012).

¹⁰ Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (SBT), one of the largest television networks in Brazil.

¹¹ Both events were organized by the Recife based, all-female graffiti collective, Coletivo Flores Crew (Flower Crew Collective).